Policy Brief on
Disability Inclusive Parliament

Being the ‘people’s house’ of the government, the role of the parliament is to reflect the needs and wants of all citizens while making laws and overseeing government activities. Persons with disabilities face difficulties to get their voices heard in the Parliament. A disability inclusive Parliament will not only fulfill the constitutional commitment of ensuring political equality for all citizens, but it will also fulfill SDG’s promise of ‘no one leaves behind’.

- 7% of the population of Bangladesh have disabilities¹²
- 76% cannot take part in the whole election process³
- 44% find the voting centers inaccessible⁴

- Parliament promotes citizen’s rights by -
  - having 300 elected MPs representing their constituencies and 50 selected MPs to ensure women’s representation in the Parliament.
  - passing laws through examining draft bills and having debates and votes on the bills.
  - parliamentary standing committee overseeing government activities.
  - approving, monitoring, and auditing national budget.

- To make Parliament disability inclusive, we need to identify how -
  - to encourage MPs increase advocating for rights of persons with disability and ensure representation of persons with disabilities in the Parliament.
  - to ensure the laws reflect the needs and wants of persons with disabilities and are accessible to them after they have been passed.
  - parliamentary standing committee can ensure disability inclusion in the government programs and spendings.
  - to develop and implement a disability sensitive national budget.
Disability-inclusive Process, Policy and People

This policy brief highlights a number of best practices from around the world in ensuring disability-inclusive parliament. Some key examples are given on the overleaf. Based on a review of global policies and practices, some ideas and examples are highlighted here on how the processes, policies and people can promote a disability-inclusive parliament...

Communication

Having a communication strategy that addresses the following might enhance accessibility of the persons with disabilities:
- Accessible website of the parliament
- Sign language interpretation in the broadcast of parliamentary sessions.

Infrastructure

Following provisions of Bangladesh National Building Code 2000 would help making disability-friendly infrastructure:
- Accessible entrance and parking area, step-free corridors, routes and sitting area complying with the recommended dimensions.
- Floor and pavements with firm, even, slip-resistant, and a stable surface having tactile ground surface indicators.
- At least one accessible toilet at each floor or 5% of total toilets, whichever is bigger.
- Clear signage for easy navigation inside the building.

Disability Inclusive Process

All European Parliament buildings have at least one entrance that is accessible by wheelchair. The car parks in the Parlaments have spaces reserved for disabled drivers, and the entrances are equipped with tables and cash desks adjusted for people using a wheelchair. Working dogs are allowed onto the Parliament premises.

Sessions

Following are a few suggestions that might help making the parliamentary sessions accessible for MPs, visitors, and staff with disabilities:
- Audio induction loops.
- Sign language interpreters.
- Extra speaking time to MPs with special needs.

Policies/bills

- Consult with persons with disabilities and concerned organizations when developing or revising policies and laws.
- An accessible version of different policies and bills concerning persons with disabilities can be prepared.

Budget

- Hold pre-budget consultations with persons with disabilities and relevant stakeholders.
- Mainstream disability in budget advocacy.
- Budget allocation and projects related to disability issues can be compiled as a separate document and prepare an accessible version of it (e.g. Braille).

Disability Inclusive People

- In the 50 reserved seats for women, provision of women candidates with disabilities can be encouraged.
- Inspection of gender reserved seats for persons with disabilities can be also a step towards inclusion.
- Sensitizing Parliamentarians on realities and challenges faced by persons with disabilities.

Standing Committee

- The Standing Committee on Ministry of Social Welfare can have special agenda focusing on disability rights.

Future leaders

- Following steps can be taken to encourage future politicians with disabilities:
  - Build leadership skills of potential candidates with disabilities.
  - Introduce mentorship programs for young leaders with disabilities under elected MPs.

Parliamentary staff

- Having a focal or a group of trained parliamentary staff on disability would be helpful in providing assistance to staff and visitors with disabilities.

Laws in Uganda, Liberia, Rwanda, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Afghanistan, Philippines and Namibia set certain number of seats to be reserved for persons with disabilities to increase their representation in the Parliament.

Scottish Government funds several internship schemes. They include: Swift Disability Equality Internships in the Scottish Parliament, with placements in Human Resources, Facilities Management, and Committee Offices.

If possible, providing technical and financial support to candidates with disabilities for creating a “level playing field” would help them in competing with the candidates without disability.

The UK government launched the place Access to Elector Office for Disabled People Fund in 2018 to provide money to disabled people seeking elected office with the aim of enabling them to compete on a “level playing field” with candidates without disability.
Reserve seats for persons with disabilities in parliaments around the world

Uganda

5 out of 529 seats are reserved for persons with disabilities in the Parliament of Uganda which are designated by special electoral colleges. Four of these MPs represent four regions of Uganda and a female MP with disabilities represents all women in the country.

Liberia

Liberia established seven ‘Special Constituencies’ for special groups of people. The Equal Representation and Participation Act of 2016 mandates that a person with disabilities will represent one of these constituencies in the House of Representatives.

Rwanda

The Federation of the Association of the Disabled in Rwanda appoints one person with disabilities as a member of the Chamber of Deputies. This deputy is not tied down to any constituency, like most deputies of Rwanda.

Namibia

In 2005, the first member with a disability was appointed in Namibia. The president of Namibia appoints unelected members based on their special expertise.

Egypt

120 seats of Egypt’s Majlis Al-Nuwab (House of Representatives) are contested through the electoral list system from country-wide four multi-seat constituencies. Each party must include at least 3 or 1 candidate with disabilities in their list depending on the size of the constituencies.

Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, the president appoints two persons with disabilities along with 100 members for a five-year term in the Meshrano Jirga (the House of Elders).

Kenya

Political parties in Kenya nominate 12 unelected seats to ensure representation of special interest groups, such as youth, persons with disabilities, and workers according to their proportion of members in the National assembly.

Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, out of 80 members in the Senate, 1 male and 1 female with disabilities are elected on separate ballots by an electoral college designated by the National Disability Board.
Global and national commitment for persons with disabilities

Rights to accessibility

Article 9 of CRPD requires States Parties to take appropriate measures to ensure the access of persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas.

SDG Target 11.7 aims to provide universal access to safe, inclusive, and accessible, green, and public spaces, particularly for women and children, older persons, and persons with disabilities.

Bangladesh National Building Code 2020 states all building shall have universal accessibility.

The Rights and Protection of Person’s with Disability Act, 2013 protect rights of the persons with disabilities to accessibility into all premises (public and private including open space and buildings) and the ability to use public transport without restrictions, as well as unrestricted access to opportunities and services, information, data, technology, and any form of communication.

Rights to political inclusion

Article 29 of CRPD requires States Parties to guarantee that persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in political and public life on an equal basis with others, by protecting the right of persons with disabilities to stand for elections, to effectively hold office and perform all public functions at all levels of government, facilitating the use of assistive and new technologies where appropriate.

SDG Target 10.2 emphasizes the social, economic, and political inclusion persons with disabilities.

The Rights and Protection of persons with Disability Act, 2013 clarifies the right of full and active participation of persons with disabilities in social, economic, and political spheres, along with the right to be registered as voters, the right to vote and the right to take part in elections.

Endnote

7. Inter-Parliamentary Union, (n.d.), P&U PARLINE database: EGYPT (Majlis Al-Nuwaab), Electoral system, Inter-Parliamentary Union.